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SUCCESS STORY

Saving Children with Simple Tools

Mosquito nets and other preventive tools have a big impact on child health



Photo: USAID

Two very healthy children enjoying life in Tanzania.

“The Government of Tanzania should be very proud of the major improvements in child health over the last five years,” said a USAID official.

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Tanzania has made impressive gains in infant and child health, according to the country's latest Demographic and Health Survey. Developed by USAID, the survey is conducted periodically to measure child survival, family planning, and other important health indicators. The survey found that, between 1999 and 2004, Tanzania's infant mortality rate fell 31 percent, to 68 deaths per 1,000 live births — one of the lowest rates in East Africa. Also, the mortality rate for children under five declined by 24 percent.

With USAID support, the country has broadened access to essential drugs and increased health training in child illnesses. Tanzania has also enhanced programs known to influence child health and survival, such as administering vitamin A supplements, increasing use of insecticide-treated mosquito nets at night, preventing malaria in pregnant women through antimalarial medications, and promoting breastfeeding of infants.

The 2004 survey found that 85 percent of Tanzanian toddlers and children up to five years old had received vitamin A supplements in the previous six months. Tanzanian children are sleeping under mosquito nets to reduce transmission of malaria and other insect-borne diseases more than before — over one in three children under age five slept under a mosquito net the night before the survey, compared to about only one in five children in 1999. Close to half of all pregnant women now receive preventive antimalarial treatment — reducing the risk of maternal mortality, miscarriage, and premature birth. Finally, the percentage of mothers who breastfeed their children exclusively during their child's first two months rose from 58 to 70, strengthening their infants' chances of survival.

Mosquito nets, preventive antimalarial treatment, breastfeeding, and vitamin A — these are the simple, affordable, and low-tech solutions that are saving children's lives every day.